

**Amendments to the Claims:**

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) An electric-component holding apparatus comprising:  
a component holder which holds an electric component and which includes an engaging portion;  
a holder-holding member to which the component holder is detachably attached;  
a lock member which consists of a substantially rigid body, and which is supported by the holder-holding member such that the lock member is movable relative to the holder-holding member, and is engaged with the engaging portion of the component holder to lock the component holder to the holder-holding member; and  
a locked-state maintaining device which includes an operable member and an elastic member and which maintains, owing to an elastic force of the elastic member, a locked state in which the lock member is engaged with the engaging portion of the component holder,  
wherein the locked-state maintaining device prevents the lock member to transmit any components of an external force to the operable member to increase an amount of elastic deformation of the elastic member, when the external force to cause the component holder to move away from the holder-holding member is exerted to the component holder in the locked state, and the locked-stated maintaining device allows the lock member to be moved, due to the external force, relative to the holder-holding member, disengaged from the engaging portion of the component holder and unlocked from the locked state, when the operable member is operated by an operating force to increase the amount of elastic deformation of the elastic member.

2. (Previously Presented) The electric-component holding apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the component holder comprises a suction nozzle which applies a negative pressure to the electric component and thereby holds the component.

3. (Withdrawn) The electric-component holding apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the component holder comprises a plurality of holding jaws which cooperate with each other to hold the electric component.

4. (Previously Presented) The electric-component holding apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the holder-holding member comprises a cylindrical portion which has an inner fitting hole and additionally has a through-hole radially formed therethrough to open, at an inner one of opposite open ends thereof, in the inner fitting hole, and the component holder comprises a fitting shank which is fitable in the inner fitting hole of the holder-holding member and which has an engaging recess as the engaging portion of the component holder, wherein the lock member is held in the through-hole of the cylindrical portion such that the lock member is movable in the through-hole in an axial direction of the through-hole parallel to an axis line thereof and is substantially immovable in a direction perpendicular to the axial direction, and the lock member has a dimension which assures that the lock member can simultaneously project out of both the opposite open ends of the through-hole, and wherein the locked-state maintaining device comprises (a) a sleeve which moveably fits on an outer circumferential surface of the cylindrical portion of the holder-holding member, and is movable to an operative position thereof in which the sleeve faces the through-hole and keeps the lock member engaged with the engaging recess of the component holder, and to a retracted position thereof in which the sleeve allows the lock member to be disengaged from the engaging recess, (b) the elastic member which biases the sleeve to the operative position thereof, and (c) the operable member which receives the operating force to move the sleeve to the retracted position thereof against the elastic force of the elastic member.

5. (Previously Presented) The electric-component holding apparatus according to claim 4, wherein the lock member comprises a ball which has a diameter greater than a length of the through-hole in the axial direction thereof.

6. (Previously Presented) The electric-component holding apparatus according to claim 4, wherein the operable member is integral with the sleeve.

7. (Withdrawn) The electric-component holding apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the holder-holding member has a fitting hole and additionally has a holding hole which crosses the fitting hole while partly overlapping, in space, the fitting hole, and the component holder comprises a fitting shank which is fitable in the fitting hole of the holder-holding member and which has an engaging recess as the engaging portion of the component holder, wherein the lock member comprises a lock bar which is held in the holding hole of the holder-holding member such that the lock bar is movable in the holding hole in an axial direction of the holding hole parallel to an axis line thereof, and is substantially immovable in a direction perpendicular to the axial direction, and the lock bar is movable to an operative position thereof in which the lock bar is engaged with the engaging recess of the component holder, and to a retracted position thereof in which the lock bar is disengaged from the engaging recess, and wherein the locked-state maintaining device comprises (a) the elastic member which biases the lock bar to the operative position thereof, and (b) the operable member which receives the operating force to move the lock bar to the retracted position thereof against the elastic force of the elastic member.

8. (Withdrawn) The electric-component holding apparatus according to claim 7, wherein the lock bar comprises a lock pin which has a circular transverse cross section.

9. (Withdrawn) The electric-component holding apparatus according to claim 7, wherein the operable member is integral with the lock bar.

10. (Withdrawn) The electric-component holding apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the holder-holding member comprises one of a fitting hole and a fitting shank fitable in the fitting hole, and the component holder comprises the other of the fitting hole and the fitting shank, wherein the lock member comprises a lock lever which is supported by the holder-holding member such that the lock lever is pivotable, about an axis line perpendicular to a common line of the fitting hole and the fitting shank, to an operative position thereof in which the lock lever is engaged with the engaging portion of the component holder to prevent the component holder from moving away from the holder-holding member, and to a retracted position thereof in which the lock lever is disengaged from the engaging portion, and wherein the locked-state maintaining device comprises (a) the elastic member which biases the lock lever to the operative position thereof, and (b) the operable member which receives the operating force to move the lock lever to the retracted position thereof against the elastic force of the elastic member.

11. (Withdrawn) The electronic-component holding apparatus according to claim 10, wherein the operable member is integral with the lock lever.

12. (Previously Presented) The electric-component holding apparatus according to claim 4, wherein the inner fitting hole comprises a tapered hole having an inner tapered surface, and wherein the fitting shank comprises a tapered shank having an outer tapered surface which is fitable in the inner tapered surface of the tapered hole.

13-16. (Canceled)

17. (Previously Presented) An electric-component holding apparatus, comprising:  
a component holder which holds an electric component and which includes an engaging portion;  
a holder-holding member to which the component holder is detachably attached;

a lock member which consists of a substantially rigid body, and which is supported by the holder-holding member such that the lock member is movable relative to the holder-holding member, and is engaged with the engaging portion of the component holder to lock the component holder to the holder-holding member; and

a locked-state maintaining device which includes an operable member and an elastic member and which maintains, owing to an elastic force of the elastic member, a locked state in which the lock member is engaged with the engaging portion of the component holder,

wherein the operable member is movable, relative to the holder-holding member, to an operative position thereof in which the operable member does not allow the lock member to be disengaged from the engaging portion of the component holder, and to a retracted position thereof in which the operable member allows the lock member to be disengaged from the engaging portion,

wherein the elastic member biases the operable member to the operative position thereof, and

wherein the operable member receives an operating force to move to the retracted position thereof against the elastic force of the elastic member.